

Shriners Hospitals for Children Open

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TPC Summerlin

Francesco Molinari

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Okay, we'd like to welcome Francesco Molinari into the virtual interview room here at Shriners Hospitals for Children Open.

Francesco, you're making your return to the PGA Tour for the first time since the THE PLAYERS Championship was canceled in March. If we can get some comments about being back out on TOUR.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, obviously feels great after such a long layoff to be back. You know, I didn't think at THE PLAYERS that it will be so long to get back.

But, yeah, I'm happy to be here. Lost my voice at the right time. (Laughter.) Yeah, so, you know, I don't know -- I think we need to start over again.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, let's take a minute and let you drink some water there.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: No rush.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Right. Go again.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, as we were saying, welcome back The TOUR. If we can get some comments on being back.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, I'm just very happy to be here. You know, it's been a long layoff. I did not think at the start that it would be so long, even though I guess no one knew exactly what would be happening.

But, yeah, I just decided to take some time off to work out a few things with the family. Obviously we moved over here to California during this time, so, yeah, it's been different. Not something I thought I would do in my career, but, you know, it's in a way it was nice to take a break and stay away for a bit.



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I definitely feel refreshed and looking forward to being back playing golf.

THE MODERATOR: And you'll be making your second start at this event. Finished tied for fourth in 2016. What do you remember about that week and what are your goals for the upcoming week?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, I have good memories from that week. I had a great Sunday round. I think finished top 5 or top 6.

Yeah, it's a course I enjoyed last time I was here. Obviously great weather. I think coming back after a long break it's probably a good event to be at. It's usually not too windy.

But, yeah, my expectations for this week, to be honest, are quite low. I haven't played that much golf really in the last few months, so we'll see what happens here.

For me it's just a case of being back out starting the process and just being ready to see what I can do on the course.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, thank you for that. We'll get started with questions.

Q. Nice to see you again.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Thank you.

Q. Just for starters, why did you move and which city did you move to and when?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: So we -- well, we were thinking about moving over to be honest in the last few years with my wife and my family obviously spending more and more time over here. I think we're not the only ones. The situation with COVID kind of made us think about our setup, and when it kind of happened I was over here in Florida; my wife was in London; both our of families were in Italy.

So you ask yourself a few questions, and we just decided

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to make the move. Obviously it's not an easy thing to do in general, and it's even harder to do in these circumstances.

But, yeah, we're now happy to be here. Probably not settled yet. We moved, flew over in mid-July. We spent some time in San Francisco but in the end decided to move down to L.A., Southern California. So now we're there. We got schools and a house sorted and all of that, so starting slowly to feel like we really settling.

It's going to take time obviously, but we are happy to be here as a family.

Q. Were you still in San Francisco during the PGA?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: I was, yeah. I was there. Obviously not at the course, but I was in town, yeah.

Q. Long time no see.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Hi, Bernie.

Q. Good to see you again. In terms of decisions, this is probable been the biggest decision in your career to take the family and up-stakes and go to the States?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, probably. Yeah, I would say not only in career-wise, it's obviously more of a family decision in the end, life decision. When my wife and I moved to London 12, 13 years ago obviously we had no kids. It's a bit different when you do before kids. Now there is a lot more moving parts, I guess.

But, yeah, I think it's worth a shot. I want to try and achieve as many things as possible in let's say the second part of my career. My wife is supportive of that, and obviously she's probably the one I guess in the toughest spot because she's even further away from her family and friends.

But, yeah, she's supportive of that, and I'm going to try to make the most of it obviously, and hopefully we can settle in California and be there for a long time.

Q. Just a quick follow-up question. You put out a tweet I think maybe yesterday in Italian on your Twitter account. One of the guys translated it. The comments sort of a Francesco, you'll be back. Never had a problem with the game, and that sort stuff. Have you been affected in some way personally by the negative comments that you may or may not have read over the last sort of period since you played THE PLAYERS?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, to be honest, I haven't read anything.

Q. Good.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: We were pretty busy with other things. I knew obviously there were some questions.

But like I said, it was just a family decision, and I think that the circumstances with COVID, like I said, made a lot of people think about their setup and traveling a lot and all of that.

I probably didn't think that our situation in London with kind of my schedule and what I wanted to do was sustainable for much longer, so we decided to give it a try and see how it will go.

Q. Francesco, how much golf have you played and where have you been practicing?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: I've been playing probably as little golf as ever in my life. I was practicing in London before the move, and then I took a break when we physically moved over.

That's why I'm saying I've got pretty low expectations for this week. I'm definitely far away from where I want to be physically, mentally, technically in the long-term.

But it's nice to be back and it's the start of the process, I guess. I'm looking forward to playing a lot more golf in the coming weeks.

In L.A. I've been practicing mostly at Virginia Country Club just because they've been nice enough to host me, and Jamie Mulligan is there and he was kind enough to welcome me and my team to do the work we needed to do.

Q. Do you feel like you have enough time to get ready for the Masters?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: I don't know. We have to see. I think -- no, to be honest. Probably I will need an extra month or so. My goal mentally really is to be 100% for January next year. Anything that comes before then in this period of time, it's kind of a bonus.

I don't know. It's all new. It's a situation -- luckily I never had injuries or big injuries in my career so I never had such a long break from the game, so it's all kind of new and exciting.

This week obviously going to be pretty important to see how I react under pressure after such a long break. It will kind of dictate what I do between now and Augusta.

But, yeah, I'm not expecting to be 100% ready for Augusta, no.

Q. Were you surprised that you ended up being the last player really to come back from the COVID break?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, I don't think so. When I stopped, I think pretty quickly I realized that we wanted to move. I realize it was going to take time, and mentally you kind of prepare yourself for that.

It was good first of all to see when the TOUR restarted obviously everything was fine, players and caddies and everyone involved was safe and everything was going well.

But, yeah, mentally I kind of prepared myself for a long break. I wasn't surprised. I imagine when I saw that it was safe and everyone was fine, I imagine that everyone else would've started pretty quickly.

Q. And just last one. I think part of the reason you originally liked London so much is your coach Dennis Pugh was there. How does being in L.A. affect your relationship with him?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, we're still working together. Obviously going to be a different setup. I'm in a different stage in my career. I feel I can manage better my game and my swing. I know more about it. With the technology, you know, available nowadays, I can send him videos, we can do live sessions.

So there is ways to go around it. We'll see how that works, but I'm pretty positive we can still do some good work together.

Q. Welcome back, Francesco.

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Hi, Rex. Thank you.

Q. Did you miss golf while you were away or the TOUR while you were away?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah. I think maybe not so much at the beginning, but definitely the longer you're away the more I was missing it. Yeah, especially, you know, not playing the U.S. PGA, the U.S. Open, but even just seeing everyone as out playing. I was watching obviously on TV.

So, yeah, I did miss it. But like I said before, I kind of had a peace of mind to say I've consciously decided to do this with the family, and I want to do it in the right way. It's going to take as long as it needs to take, and I'll be back when I'm ready to mentally compete in a golf tournament.

Q. I guess the quick follow-up is do you feel like you're refreshed after all that time away?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah. Yeah, very -- mentally I'm definitely in a very different spot than I was in February or March. I wasn't in a great place with my game back then and I was low in confidence, which happens throughout the career. But it was probably in a way a good time for me to take a step away from the game.

I think I'm more motivated now than I was back then before the break. Like I said, I'm nowhere near where I want to be long-term physically and technically and mentally, but there is time. There is no rush.

It's going to be a long process. It's going to be kind of a grind to get back. I know it's not going to be that easy. But I'm ready for the challenge.

Q. Why did you choose to come back here and what's your schedule going forward until January?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: To be honest, I mean, I decided probably a month ago to come back here because I was starting to be in a place where I could do some work at home and start the preparation. I thought it would be a good event having played here a few years ago. You know, it's not particularly windy here. I think it's a course that it's in front of you. There is no tricks or anything like that.

So I thought it was a good week to come back. Obviously kind of thinking about the Masters, too. Initially I had thought about coming back at Winged Foot, but probably that was a good choice not to go straight into a week like that.

So I'll play here, probably have a few weeks off after this at home, you know, really grinding out and trying to make some progress with the game and with my body, and then play Houston the week before Augusta and then Augusta.

Then I think that probably might be it for the year just to give myself the time to really work out at home and be 100% ready for January like I was saying before.

Q. Are you working with Jamie at all or just being a wonderful host to you?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: No, no, we're not working, but he's just been great. Everyone there a Virginia has been very accommodating, so it's been nice place to go every day.



Q. How hard was it to skip a major when you're healthy, and what actually of you doing during those two weeks?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: It is hard for sure, you know, knowing you're missing one of the biggest tournaments of the year.

But like I said, I knew I wasn't ready to play, and there is no point in just showing up to be there. When you are where I am in my career, I played fortunately enough majors to I guess be able to miss one if you don't feel ready for it.

So I can't remember what I was doing to be honest. Week of PGA we were in San Francisco; I think I took the kids to the zoo and we were just trying to find ways to make everyone feel kind of at home.

The week of the U.S. Open I just, yeah, watched on TV. I was doing a little practice by then, so I was kind of hitting balls and keeping an eye on the scores.

Q. Just a quick one. Talking about excitement in teeing up this week in Las Vegas, will it be hard to not set the alarm and watch the coverage from Wentworth?

FRANCESCO MOLINARI: Yeah, I mean, Wentworth has been one my favorite events. Again, I was lucky enough to win it a couple years back. I'll be definitely watching them when I'm not playing.

Kind of was my home event for 10, 12 years, so I'll miss not playing there, but hopefully I can go back some time in the near future.

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